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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. AND ASEAN

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage July 24 on a DPP Central Review Committee's decision Thursday to suspend two senior DPP members for attending a recent KMT-CCP forum; and on the Control Yuan motions passed Thursday to censure the Ministry of National Defense for corrupt military discipline and for the ministry's inactivity in handling a 30-year-old defection case. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" discussed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's recent remarks at the ASEAN Regional Forum in Thailand. The article said the United States wants to "come back" to Southeast Asia because it wants to cope with China. End summary.

"What Is the United States 'Back' to Southeast Asia for?"

The "International Lookout" column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] wrote (7/24):

"U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said during an annual meeting of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in Thailand that '[T]he United States is back in Southeast Asia.' This [statement] sounded like bald-faced big talk, because [she] could hardly explain clearly when the United States left [the region] and why it wants to 'come back' now. As a matter of fact, the United States had paid little attention to ASEAN in the wake of the Cold War era, because the latter not only seemed valueless [for the United States] to exploit but also lacked a common sense of value [among its members]. ...

"If one must ask when the United States left [Southeast Asia], then the answer should be: right after it lost the war in Vietnam. Now [Washington said] it wants to come back, [does that mean that] it will send large forces to Southeast Asia again? If the signing of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation can be regarded [as a move to] come back [to the region], then why has [the United States] procrastinated over it for so many years and did not want to sign it until now? The reason is simple and straight: It is aimed at coping with China. ...

"When it comes to returning [to the region], one must bring with oneself some gifts and deeds. What Clinton brought is the [United States'] 'cooperation with the countries of the Lower Mekong.' This gift seems interesting, but it is actually not viable, because it will cost a lot of money. Now that Washington is in serious debt trouble, where can it find the cash to carry out such a plan? ... The four countries of the Lower Mekong -- Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam -- all have close economic ties with China. Will they be willing to shake off an old friend who is generous with money to accommodate a new friend who is penniless?"

WANG